

LIVING IN AN EARTHQUAKE

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LIVING IN AN EARTHQUAKE

*The Fight Against Cop City Confronts
Unprecedented Repression*

ANONYMOUS



LIVING IN AN EARTHQUAKE

May 24: Department of Homeland Security issues its National Terrorism Advisory bulletin for May-November 2023. It includes the movement in its summary of possible threats of terrorism. All of the other threats are racist groups and far-right causes.

May 26: A Nationwide Insurance office in Des Moines, Iowa is visited by forest defenders. By way of their subsidiary Scottsdale Insurance, Nationwide provides coverage for the APF and their contract with Brasfield & Gorrie.

May 27: The commencement ceremony at Bard College is disrupted when Georgia Senator Raphael Warnock arrives to speak at the podium. Students, alumni, and community members chant slogans, pass out fliers, and hold up banners at the event, disrupting it completely. Warnock has yet to make his position on Cop City clear, although when prompted by a journalist, he has publicly stated he was “not on record supporting Cop City.” Atlanta Community Press Collective reveals that tax liability for Cop City is actually double what politicians claimed, and always was intended to be.

May 31: At about 8:30 am, Georgia Bureau of Investigations and Atlanta Police Department raid the home of three activists in east Atlanta. They arrest three people they claim are members of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, charging them all with “charity fraud” and “money laundering.” Later that day, 120 people hold an emergency demonstration at Dekalb County Jail. National Lawyers Guild and state legislators denounce the state Attorney General Chris Carr in written statements online.

June 2: At the bond hearing of the May 31 arrestees, the judge grants bond, saying he is “unconvinced” by the argument of the Prosecutor John Fowler. City Hall announces that all services on June 5 will be canceled except for the City Council meeting and that liquids will not be allowed inside.

June 4: The full membership of the Atlanta Police Foundation is doxed. The Buckhead Coalition, a business alliance of wealthy Atlanta elites, is doxed for their advocacy of Cop City.

June 5: 1000 people flood Atlanta City Hall to denounce Cop City at the City Council vote. About 300 of them are prevented from entering and briefly attempt to break into the building. For fifteen hours straight, people use the public comment section of the meeting to speak out emotionally against Cop City. At dawn, Atlanta City Council nonetheless votes “yes” to allocating over \$60 million to fund the project.

June 6: All of the councilmembers who voted “yes” are doxxed.

June 7: Offices of Alta Vista and Bank of America vandalized with paint-filled balloons in Oakland, California. The home address of Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens appears online.

encampment on the Quad, forcing them to leave under threat of arrest.

April 25: The Georgia Bureau of Investigations attempts to conduct a media operation claiming that the April 21 autopsy report does show gunshot residue on the hands of Tortuguita. Media largely ignores the story as the GBI statement admits that Tort suffered 57 gunshot wounds and because these injuries were incurred at close range, traces of gunshot residue could have come from the entry of bullets into both of their hands. The GBI report names the officers involved in the killing. ATMs at a Bank of America in East Atlanta are sabotaged.

April 30: Police attempt to intimidate participants in a demonstration in Eugene, Oregon. Fliers and a brick are left at the door of a Nationwide Insurance office later that day. Nationwide is one of the insurance providers for the APF.

May 2: Three people are arrested in Bartow County, Georgia for allegedly posting fliers about the officers who killed Tortuguita. The three are held in solitary confinement, denied bond, and are charged with “Intimidate Law Enforcement officer/family in retaliation to discharge of duties by force” and misdemeanor stalking.

May 4: Preliminary hearings begin concurrently in Dekalb and Fulton County courts for the March 5 and January 21 arrestees respectively. One person is granted bond, while two arrested on March 5 are denied bond in Dekalb County court. In the Fulton County hearing, a judge upheld domestic terrorism charges against alleged participants in a demonstration following the killing of Tortuguita. District Attorney Fowler compared the breaking of the windows of the APF headquarters to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center.

May 9: A Michigan State Police sign is vandalized in solidarity with the movement to stop Cop City.

May 15: Nearly 500 people flood the City Council meeting at City Hall. Before the sign-up list is closed, 288 people sign up for public comment. The others begin chanting slogans. The meeting is dominated by nearly eight hours of public comment, all of which is opposed to Cop City. This may be the largest mobilization of local protesters yet outside concerts and parties.

May 20: Over 100 local residents gather for a block party in Glen Emerald Park, an event organized chiefly by canvassers and attended by residents who live in direct proximity to the forest.

May 22: In Springfield, Illinois, activists visit Corporation Services Company, which handles investments for Ryan Milsap.

May 23: In Rochester, protesters visit the office of Invesco, a major donor to the APF.

At first, it appeared to be an ordinary forest defense campaign aimed at discouraging Atlanta city government from pouring money into an unpopular police training facility. But over the past two years, the fight against Cop City has escalated into one of the fiercest struggles of the Biden era, pitting a wide range of courageous people against a united front of politicians, prosecutors, and police.

In setting out to stop the militarization of police, activists have discovered that they are challenging the state on a point that all of its representatives consider non-negotiable. Police and prosecutors have pressed trumped-up domestic terrorism charges against almost every defendant arrested since last December; they have killed one forest defender; they have charged those engaged in legal support for the arrestees. The situation is tense ahead of a sixth Week of Action in support of the movement, scheduled to take place June 24 through July 1.

In the following account and analysis, participants in the movement in Atlanta trace its trajectory from the fifth Week of Action that began on March 4, 2023 through the City Council vote of June 5. For background, consult these articles:

- “The City in the Forest,” chronicling the first year of the movement
- “The Forest in the City,” chronicling the second year of the movement
- “Balance Sheet,” exploring the strategies that different currents in the movement have employed

LIVING IN AN EARTHQUAKE

Since March 2023, the movement to defend the Weelaunee Forest and stop the construction of Cop City has confronted new and difficult challenges. The consecutive waves of repression against the movement are turning this struggle into a historic confrontation. While forest defenders, lawyers, activists, anarchists, and local residents continue to pressure contractors, organize legal support, and host cultural and educational events, repression is taking a toll.

These attacks are not unique to the movement, despite the authorities’ attempts to single it out. Across the country, we are seeing a systematic clampdown, including the banning of books, an assault on trans people and reproductive freedom, and open attacks on “the left.” And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

As we head into the mid-21st century—which is shaping up to be an era of wars, ecological crises, pandemics, mass displacement, and social

conflict—police are more fundamental to governance than ever. No one who wishes to hold state power can do without their backing. That explains why the Democratic Party has doubled down on unqualified support for police even after the largest protest movement in United States history erupted in response to police violence. Efforts to reform police through institutional channels have all run aground, leaving grassroots direct action campaigns like the one in Atlanta the only hope for change.

Around the world, governments are relying on police to keep an increasingly volatile situation under control. This gives the police themselves outsized influence and access to state resources. Years before the French police initiated their latest wave of violence against protesters, it was clear that they have disproportionate leverage on the French government. Colombia, Iran, and many other countries have experienced their own equivalents of the George Floyd Rebellion because police have come to play the same role everywhere, using brute force to preserve racialized power disparities.

So in the fight against Cop City, people in Atlanta are taking on the institution that is most central to the functioning of the state in our time. No wonder it has become such a pitched battle. What happens in Atlanta will set far-reaching precedents.

FEBRUARY 2023

This chapter of the story begins in the wake of the final police raid on the forest occupations, during which Georgia State Patrol killed forest defender Manuel Teran, known in the forest as Tortuguita.

During the final week of February 2023, Atlanta police escorted heavy machinery owned by the Brent Scarborough Company into the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. Subcontractors working under contract with Brasfield & Gorrie hastily erected new fencing, put down thousands of pounds of gravel, and felled trees. The Phase 1 Construction Plan, originally slated to begin on May 1, 2022 but halted by the third Week of Action, finally got underway. In this phase, the Atlanta Police Foundation intended to initiate “erosion control” and to clearcut all the trees. Forest defenders had continuously resisted this for two years.

Anticipating a new phase of resistance, the Mayor’s office announced the formation of a new, supplemental, community task force. This organization, the “South River Forest Public Safety Training Center Community Task Force,” sought to integrate the South River Forest Vision with the construction

March 19: GI Partners is spray-painted with a fire extinguisher in Embarcadero Center, San Francisco in retaliation for attacks on Weelaunee Forest.

March 23: At the second bond hearing for the March 5 arrestees, 15 people are released, while 8 are denied bond for allegedly having jail support numbers written on their bodies (which is not a crime, nor evidence of one). Deputy Attorney General John Fowler associates the ongoing movement to the 2020 protests following the killing of Rayshard Brooks and to an “organization” allegedly formed in 2019. He attributes over 100 acts nationwide to the movement.

March 24: Dekalb County CEO Michael Thurmond announces the closure of Intrenchment Creek Park to the public, citing supposed “safety concerns.”

March 25: Spelman College alumnae publish an open letter denouncing Cop City.

March 26: After courts deny bail to music festival arrestees, the home addresses of the two municipal judges appear online. Another post lists the suspected addresses of the chief APD investigator of the movement, Ronald Sluss, as well as the Atlanta Assistant Police Chief and GBI Special Agent on the case.

March 31: The Brent Scarborough Company begins clearcutting at the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. A few dozen people gather at City Hall on short notice. Dozens of police vehicles are deployed.

April 5: Three machines belonging to Brent Scarborough Company are burned in Atlanta in retaliation for the destruction the company is wreaking in Weelaunee Forest.

April 6: A March 28 inspection of the Old Atlanta Prison Farm near Key road found the site to be in violation of code. No Stop Work order was issued until April 6, when Dekalb County issued one. City of Atlanta officials interceded, conducting a private meeting and getting the order lifted within about two hours. The announcement that the Stop Work order was lifted was published at 4:42 pm by City of Atlanta. The announcement that a Stop Work order had been made in the first place was published at 8:30 pm that same day by the Dekalb government.

April 21: The official Dekalb County autopsy report on the killing of Tortuguita suggests that no gunpowder residue was found on their hands.

April 22–23: In honor of Earth Day, April 22, and Tortuguita’s birthday, April 23, dozens of events and actions occur in at least 17 cities.

April 24: Demonstrations take place at Agnes Scott College, Emory University, Georgia State University, Morehouse College, Georgia Institute of Technology, Spelman College, and Clark Atlanta University. Late at night, dozens of police vehicles encircle Emory students who had initiated an

APF. All 67 arrests associated with the movement up to this point are assigned the same case number. A few dozen protesters march to Georgia Pacific and Norfolk Southern headquarters and enter the lobby to demand they divest from the APF. As the group marches to other offices, over 100 police are mobilized to follow the group.

March 8: The Sonic Defense Committee, a group that assisted organizing the South River Music Festival, releases a statement about the March 5 raid. Graffiti appears across from police facility in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania reading “Stop Cop City.” Tortuguita’s mother holds a press conference in Weelaunee People’s Park. She spreads Tortuguita’s ashes in the area of the killing ceremonially with other forest defenders.

March 9: A demonstration at King Center marches to APF. 600 people gather to listen to speakers, chiefly organizers from Black organizations. Police across multiple agencies mobilize several hundred officers to encircle the crowd and fly drones over it. A banner is hung in New York City on the same block as Banyan Street Capital, the landlord to the APF.

March 10: A raid on Lakewood Environmental Arts Foundation targets medics and local homesteaders for alleged connection to the movement. A noise demonstration takes place outside Dekalb County Jail in solidarity with arrestees. Prisoners break windows, set objects on fire, and throw burning objects from facility to police on the street.

March 10–13: Hundreds of small farmers, ecologists, gardeners, and naturalists converge on Weelaunee People’s Park to convene a Food Autonomy Festival; the majority of them camp in the forest. Throughout the weekend, presentations and discussions take place in the Living Room and parking lot area. Hundreds of fruit-bearing plants and trees are planted in the area.

March 13: An independent autopsy conducted by a forensic pathologist indicates that Tortuguita was killed while sitting cross-legged on the ground with both of their hands in the air.

March 14: Locks at a bank of America ATM near Belmont, Massachusetts are glued.

March 16: A banner drop takes place in Montreal, Québec.

March 17: 7 ATMs belonging to Wells Fargo and Chase Bank are glued shut in Berkeley, California in solidarity with arrestees facing “Domestic Terrorism” charges. Both banks participate in the Atlanta Police Foundation. In Windsor, California, the office of a Consolidated Engineering Laboratory (CEL) is vandalized. CEL is a subsidiary of Atlas Technical Consultants.

March 18: In Philadelphia, anonymous saboteurs pour bleach into the engines of heavy machinery in memory of Tortuguita.

of Cop City. The Task Force included local bureaucrats, businesspeople with ties to Cop City, nonprofit personnel within the governmental clientele regime, bigots, and “former” CIA agents. Despite this roster, the Task Force was intended to function to coopt dissent, providing a semblance of community involvement. That strategy faced immediate setbacks, however, as the Mayor called for their first meeting to be held behind closed doors.

Organizers and groups from around the country converged in Atlanta on March 4 to begin a fifth Week of Action. Tensions were at an all-time high. On the one hand, the authorities were prepared to stop at nothing to force the unpopular Cop City project through. On the other, a new model for autonomous politics was drawing the support of thousands, many of whom were eager to participate in the movement for the first time.

THE FIFTH WEEK OF ACTION

In the weeks leading up to the fifth Week of Action, autonomous groups and organizers from around the country put together a schedule of events that was both culturally and politically diverse. A local church offered to serve as a convergence center. Ahead of the week, Ryan Millsap placed a single A-frame board at the entrance of Weelaunee People’s Park, claiming that the music festival, scheduled to begin on March 4, had not received proper permitting. This was a step back from the concrete barriers he had illegally installed ahead of the fourth Week of Action in summer 2022.

Nobody could stop what was coming, and no one tried.

RETAKE WEELAUNEE PEOPLE’S PARK

The forest was empty. Following lethal and authoritarian collusion between Dekalb County CEO Michael Thurmond, Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens, and Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, all the encampments in the forest had been vacated. If the movement was to use the forest as a site of action and convergence, it would be necessary to retake the park. Toward that end, nearly 500 people gathered at Gresham Park around 10 am on the morning of March 4. At that time, this was the largest rally that had taken place in support of the movement.

Children, clergy, local organizers, bicyclists, and autonomous activists from around Atlanta and the United States mingled in the park, sharing food

and coffee while listening to fiery and heartfelt speeches. Despite the relentless efforts of locals to mobilize Atlanta residents in the weeks prior, perhaps half of those gathered were from out of town. Very few of them were from the large nonprofit organizations that had endorsed the movement after the killing of Tortuguita. Around the United States, popular support for the movement came chiefly from the most risk-tolerant and dedicated layers of activists, the same people who have resisted street-level fascist violence, the separation of families at the US-Mexico border, extractive industries, and racist policing over the past several years. The absence of people from larger formal organizations illustrated one of the limits that the movement was confronting.

Around noon, this crowd marched through Gresham Park to a paved bicycle path. This path crosses from Gresham Park beneath Bouldercrest Road directly into Weelaunee People's Park. As the crowd proceeded, activists with reinforced banners and shields gravitated to the front. The possibility of a clash with police seemed high; those in the front were determined to ensure the safety of the others.

In the end, police did not confront the parade, which succeeded in re-opening Weelaunee People's Park. Upon arriving in the parking lot area, which had been destroyed by Ryan Millsap, everyone chanted in unison "*I will defend this land.*" People shared food and water and small teams prepared infrastructure for a mass encampment.

THE SOUTH RIVER MUSIC FESTIVAL: A FLOWER BETWEEN TWO ABYSSES

Discussing Beethoven's 14th piano sonata (the "Moonlight" sonata), composer Franz Liszt described the playful and upbeat second movement as "a flower between two abysses." Whereas the first movement is brooding and morose and the final movement frenetic and dark, the jovial and light sequence in the middle of the composition playfully escorts listeners between the two. The power of the second movement derives in part from its relationship to what proceeds and follows it. The South River Music Festival played a similar role in the unfolding drama.

During the fourth Week of Action in late summer 2022, organizers had brought dozens of bands, DJs, and performers into the forest for two live music performances—one at the beginning of the week, one at the end. On the final day, Ryan Millsap and one of his hired goons showed up at Weelaunee People's Park with a tow truck and attempted to destroy the gazebo in the parking lot,

vehicles in Hartford, Connecticut are spray-painted, bicycle-locked shut, and have their locks glued for contracting with the Atlanta Police Foundation.

February 21: Activists visit the office of Atlas Technical Consultants in Westminster, Colorado. Forest defenders in Miami demonstrate outside a Brasfield & Gorrie office. In Philadelphia, protesters rally outside the offices of the law firm Greenberg Traurig, the owners of which sit on the board of the Atlanta Police Foundation. The Community Stakeholders Advisory Committee (CSAC) is abruptly cancelled.

February 22: An interfaith coalition announces their participation in the movement. A banner drop takes place in Portland, Oregon.

February 27: Mayor Dickens announces the formation of a new "civilian" task force to "supplement" the Community Stakeholders Advisory Committee.

February 28: A banner drop takes place in Eugene, Oregon. Someone damages the ATMs and windows at a Truist Bank. High-ranking employees at the Fridley branch of Atlas Technical Consultants are doxxed. A Norfolk Southern train line is sabotaged outside of Philadelphia in a manner that signals to trains to stop without endangering passengers or conductors.

March 1: The second consecutive CSAC meeting is cancelled. An ethics investigation into CSAC following their receipt of "Christmas gifts" from the Atlanta Police Foundation results in a new financial disclosure protocol for all CSAC members. Sharon Williams, the first person to use the phrase "eco-terrorism" in regards to the movement, strongly objects to this protocol. Williams is not named in official government documents and was not appointed by City Council.

March 2: APF notifies City of Atlanta that they need an additional \$16.1 million dollars in order to secure their bank loan application by June 30, 2023. Around June 2024, they will also need \$17.3 million.

March 4: The fifth week of action gets underway, beginning with the South River Music Festival.

March 5: A historic march takes place against Cop City construction site, involving hundreds of participants, burning vehicles and installations on the construction site in broad daylight. Police then raid the music festival. People in Avon, Massachusetts protest outside of Atlas Technical Consultants.

March 6: The interfaith coalition holds a press conference. Given the chance to denounce other participants in the movement, faith leaders instead denounce the violence of the authorities.

March 7: Of the 23 people arrested at the music festival, judge Anna Watkins Davis denies bond to 19. Later, it emerges she is married to an executive of KPMG, a massive accounting firm with four members on the board of the

across the country, especially in the hometowns of those accused of “Domestic Terrorism,” recognizing that prosecutors in Atlanta are attempting to set precedents that will be imitated elsewhere if they succeed. Courtroom strategies cannot be allowed to determine the course of the movement as a whole. People should seek fault lines and weak spots within the halls of power. Similar strategies have succeeded against previous efforts to repress social movements.

At minimum, when activists are arrested, when doors are kicked in, when the accused are called into court, when bond is revoked, when conditions are tightened, there should be a national response. According to classical military doctrine, space and time mitigate technological advantage: the further from the forest that activists can take action targeting those who seek to build Cop City, the safer they will likely be in doing so. The longer the project takes to advance, the more people will be able to mobilize against it, and the greater the skepticism of the financiers behind the project will become. If the funders, insurers, backers, and firms associated with the project face consequences for the attacks on activists in Atlanta, they might even exert their own pressure against the Police Foundation and against Georgia prosecutors.

If it is to survive, the movement must confront repression directly, using this as an opportunity to regain its footing.

APPENDIX: TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Assembled from publicly available reports.

February 17: Graffiti and vandalism at a Bank of America in Sonoma, California.

February 18: In Washington, DC, activists protest outside the homes of Georgia State Senators Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock, demanding they stop Cop City.

February 19: On the southern border of the Weelaunee Forest, in a parcel owned by Shadowbox studios that had not been actively defended by the movement, clearcutting is disrupted by the sabotage and burning of an excavator, bulldozer, and front-end loader. The “Autonomous Tortuguita Revenge Committee” claims responsibility for burning an ANDRA transmission pylon near Bure, France. In solidarity with Atlanta forest defenders, a skypod blockade and hunger strike is established in Humboldt County, California to protect redwoods from clearcutting.

February 20: According to a report, an Atlas Technical Consultants office and

only to be driven away while their truck was destroyed. The South River Music Festival built on this legacy, but with a much greater ambition and scale.

This time, organizers secured several popular artists including Zack Fox, Father, Ethereal, Raury, and Faye Webster. There was also considerable excitement about the bands from the do-it-yourself underground.

After re-taking the park, people erected a hand-crafted stage in the RC Field clearing. This stage was adorned with two banners. One banner, hanging behind the performers, read, “*In the eyes of the state, all who resist white supremacy, colonialism, environmental racism, gentrification, and police militarization are domestic terrorists.*” Another banner on the stage read “*Love is my sword, truth is my compass,*” a quote from Assata Shakur. Flanking the stage were a concessions area and multiple tables distributing free food and educational zines, posters, fliers, and booklets. By the time the music began, hundreds of people were already gathering in the area while others set up tents. By nightfall, some 1000 people danced, moshed, and swayed to the music, enthusiastically chanting “Stop Cop City!” and other slogans.

Many of the most creative, hopeful, sincere, and dedicated people in metro Atlanta participated in this historic unpermitted festival in a highly contested terrain. In contrast to the rally and march earlier in the day, the majority of those who attended the music festival were not activists associated with the left. As the entertainment came to an end around 3 am, many of those who attended the festival retired to their tents, but the majority went home for the night. A helicopter circled above the trees for about an hour to intimidate and surveil the hundreds who remained.

The next morning, the park teemed with conversation, food, and activity. Thanks to the morning light, it was possible to see that tents were pitched across the forest in every direction, more than ever before. During the third Week of Action, the perhaps 200 people who camped in the forest were spread out on both sides of Intrenchment Creek. This time, all of those assembled stuck only to the east side, in Weelaunee People’s Park. This could distort the perception of how many people took park in the encampment compared to previous convergences, but it was likely twice as many people as before. The composition of those assembled was more diverse than previously, judging by age and ethnicity. Perhaps half of the people in tents had arrived from out of town at the invitation of local organizers.

After lunch, music began again in the RC field, as more attendees began to return to the forest.



THE MARCH ON THE COP CITY CONSTRUCTION

Around 3 pm on Sunday, March 5, someone in a balaclava announced to the hundreds of music festival attendees that a march was going to meet in the RC field behind the bounce house. This demonstration intended to stop Cop City “directly.” Everyone was encouraged to attend, but only if they could conceal their identities and cover all identifying tattoos and markers. Perhaps 500 people were gathered around the stage listening to music, and more were arriving continuously.

An hour later, a crowd began to assemble in the RC field at some distance from the stage. Practically everyone in this crowd was masked. Many were dressed in all black, others in all camouflage, others in a mix of both. After about 45 minutes, this crowd was more than 200 strong. They walked around the perimeter of the music festival, waving and inviting others to join as other festival goers cheered and clapped. Perhaps 400 people remained for the music. As the crowd departed the RC field toward Constitution Road, a group with makeshift shields joined the front.

On Constitution Road, some participants in the procession moved about a dozen tires from the roadside, laying them across the road to block traffic in both directions. At the southside “cut” in the tree line, near the entrance of Blackhall/Shadowbox Studios, the crowd entered the Old Atlanta Prison Farm.

movement that sought victory by means of grassroots direct action. It was never guaranteed that large numbers of people would join the movement, and the participants did not wait for them to.

That was how this movement originally earned the attention of the public. This movement is not popular *despite* its militancy; it is popular *because of* it.

In September 2021, the Stop Cop City Coalition coordinated 17 hours of public comment to denounce Cop City, but Atlanta City Council approved the project all the same. This is widely known. So why pursue this same strategy again? Perhaps the killing of Tortuguita, the blanket use of Domestic Terrorism charges, and the arrests of organizers associated with the Atlanta Solidarity Fund were not enough to discredit the project? Perhaps two years of militant direct action and nationwide cultural mobilization had not radicalized enough people?

Whatever the rationale behind the mobilizations of May 15 and June 5, their meaning will be determined by what comes after them, not by what preceded them. That is up to everyone.

MAKING A VIRTUE OF NECESSITY

If the movement cannot reestablish a balance of force with its adversaries, all strategies will ultimately result in defeat. Seeking the consent of the government is a doomed venture when the authorities have repeatedly shown that they are prepared to disregard laws, precedent, public opinion, and common sense to build Cop City. The decision of Atlanta’s Interim Municipal Clerk in late June to obstruct efforts to petition for a referendum on Cop City is only the latest evidence of this. This is why direct action has been central to the movement and must remain so if it is to succeed.

Repression has effectively brought the previous phase of the movement to a conclusion. If the movement is to continue, the participants will have to find a way to turn all this repression into a liability for the ones involved in building Cop City. It is not going to end any time soon. The sooner activists can accord it a central role in their strategies, the better.

It will not suffice to publicize the fact that the repression taking place in Atlanta is outrageous and unprecedented; as argued above, Georgia politicians have little to lose. Rather, every act of repression must create a more unpredictable environment, bringing new groups and tactics into play. Perhaps arrests, police surveillance and harassment, court dates, and other occasions could become opportunities for new forms of action. People should mobilize

Dozier, Antonio Lewis, and Keisha Waites—had already been opposed to funding the facility before the events of June 5. The other eleven—Jason Winston, Amir Farokhi, Byron Amos, Alex Wan, Howard Shook, Mary Norwood, Dustin Hillis, Andrea Boone, Marci Overstreet, Michael Bond, and Matt Westmoreland—represent constituents further away from the Weelaunee Forest. None of them were swayed by the three mass mobilizations at City Council meetings of the past two years. The three mobilizations at City Council against Cop City have been the three most-attended Council meetings in Atlanta history at any time, for any purpose.

Immediately following the vote, the chambers exploded, with protesters screaming at the officials. Lines of police quickly replaced the 15 councilmembers, who were all shuttled out a back door. It was all over in a few minutes. Outside, protesters screamed, argued, and cried, some blaming each other.

In the end, this attempt to intervene in official politics—the third of its kind—was a failure. If it accomplished anything of value, it was chiefly to offer a venue for opponents of Cop City to pledge aloud to each other that they were committed to fighting the project. If the majority of Councilmembers are already bought-and-paid-for supporters of Cop City, and the fundamental role of City Council is to enact a kind of political theater to give the actions of the government a veneer of democratic legitimacy, then it could make as much sense to shut down such meetings as to participate in them.

THE THEORY OF FAILURE AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Many activist campaigns involve mobilizing people into institutional spaces, processes, or elections that the organizers themselves have little faith in. The hope is that, if nothing else, the experience will radicalize the participants, inspiring them to withdraw their faith from the prevailing institutions and invest it in counter-institutions instead. This is a risky wager: by itself, disappointment often paralyzes people rather than energizing them.

Becoming disillusioned with the authorities or developing a nuanced analysis of power structures has little impact on the world unless it gives rise to concrete actions. The role of revolutionaries is to join practical critique with critical practice. Without the first, the second is aimless. Without the second, the former is worthless.

The movement to defend Weelaunee Forest and stop Cop City did not begin with a long slog through the institutions. On the contrary, it began with a wave of nocturnal sabotage actions. From the outset, it was a bold, confident

The long stretch of grassy clearing between Constitution and Key Road is almost completely uphill. This forced the crowd to walk slowly, although the entire action seemed to depend on the element of surprise. Halfway up the hill, the march reached the erosion control silt fencing constructed by Brent Scarborough Company. Participants began to pull up and slash the fencing. Dozens of yards of silt fencing were destroyed on both the north and south sides of the cut. Further on, they also slashed and destroyed chest-high orange netting. When the crowd reached the final hill, a helicopter finally came into view and the group stopped. Many people carrying shields moved to the front of the crowd, while others carrying projectiles stepped behind them. Only 50 yards ahead, atop a hill, stood a chain-link fence behind which several police officers were visible. Beyond them, the crowd could make out a trailer, porta-potties provided by the United Rental company, multiple excavators, and other police vehicles.

The crowd surged forward, tossing fireworks and stones over the fence at the handful of officers on the other side. The police fled to their vehicles, which subsequently were targeted with projectiles. At the same time, the gate was broken open and hundreds of masked people surged into the construction zone. Dozens ran ahead to the north gate at Key Road, tossing stones, fireworks, and Molotov cocktails at the officers staging across the street or in the road. This enabled others to close the large gate, preventing police from initiating a comprehensive response.

While they were securing the gate, perhaps a hundred people set about decommissioning the construction site—toppling and burning the floodlights, smashing and burning the police vehicles, damaging and then torching the excavators and a front-end loader, overturning the porta-potties, wrecking and then setting fire to the operations trailer. This lasted no more than fifteen minutes. With no arrests, no detentions, and apparently no injuries, hundreds of people disappeared into the forest.

Despite the insinuations of the police statement and some carefully-worded corporate news articles, no one has been arrested for participating in this action. To this day, no one is facing charges associated with confronting the police at the work site, for damaging materials, or for burning equipment.

ROLE REVERSAL

Until the 2023, the movement sought to defend a position within Weelaunee Forest while isolating the forces seeking to build Cop City from the contractors, insurance companies, and banks they needed to work with.

After the killing of Tortuguita on January 18, the movement and the police found themselves on the opposite sides of this dynamic. The police raid of December 13, 2022 broke what had previously been a balance of force; afterwards, the forest encampments ceased to be a zone of meaningful defense. The local administration had succeeded in building the will and means to use lethal force against the encampments, and the movement was not capable of defending the area indefinitely as long as authorities could continuously attack it from elsewhere in the city.

In March 2023, as the Police Foundation sought to carve out a position within the forest for their contractors, the movement conducted a raid on them, turning the tables.

If it was true that the contending forces were mimicking each others' previous strategies, then it could be anticipated that the authorities would undertake a pressure campaign seeking to identify the movement's support structures (such as bail funds or media personnel) and isolate them from each another. The movement, by contrast, would need to call on a wide array of allies and forces to encircle and delegitimize the project, framing Cop City as the unrealistic fantasy of a group of dangerous fanatics, the same way that the government had been attempting to discredit the movement since spring 2021.

THE RAID ON THE SOUTH RIVER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Around 6:30 pm on March 5, roughly one hour after the raid on the Cop City construction site, police began to assemble nearly a mile away from the site, in the vicinity of the music festival. Several dozen vehicles belonging to Georgia State Patrol, Atlanta Police, DeKalb County Sheriff, the Sandy Springs Quick Response Force, the Department of Homeland Security, the Georgia Bureau of Investigations, and other agencies showed up at both West Park Place and Constitution Road.

At the time, nearly 700 people occupied Weelaunee People's Park, perhaps more. They were concentrated in the RC field, where performers were still playing at the festival. Officers began exiting their vehicles and entering the forest. Badly outnumbered and apparently without a plan, they began tasing and tackling people, seemingly at random.

Someone in a mask ran up to the stage, shouting that their friend had just been arrested and encouraging others to go support them. Unfortunately, the intention was not particularly clear aside from their repeated exclamations to the effect that police had arrived and begun grabbing people. Rather than

their time to each other, enabling a few to speak for four or even eight minutes. Besides the first couple speakers that the politicians had put at the front of the queue, every single speaker opposed the project, with many emphasizing "Cop City will never be built." Others recounted their personal experiences of police brutality or institutional neglect. Some speakers highlighted all the things that the money could be used to accomplish in the field of social services, such as libraries or public healthcare. Others flatly declared that the facility would be burned or destroyed if it were built. Several speakers addressed themselves to the movement or to society in general rather than to the elected officials. One person told the Council that if he had fifty-seven bullets—the number of entry wounds identified in Tortuguita's autopsy—he would be able to allocate three for each of the councilmembers, leaving him with two to spare.

As the hours passed, the crowd slowly thinned, but the atmosphere remained convivial in the atrium and vitriolic in the chambers. The public comment section ended around 3 am. At that time, the politicians set aside 45 minutes for those who had waited fifteen hours or more for the chance to line up and speak. After 45 minutes, the Council attempted to proceed with their meeting, despite the fact that some people had still not been permitted to speak. The chambers became rowdy. People began shouting and banging on chairs. In response, the politicians allocated time for the rest of those present to speak. When comment was finally finished, the politicians began their meeting. The first agenda item was a motion to reorganize the meeting so that the vote on funding Cop City would be the very last item. At that moment, their intentions became clear.

The Council hurried through hundreds of agenda items and motions, mostly to approve various rezoning claims and gentrification efforts across the city, as they normally do. Around 5 am, the time finally arrived to discuss Cop City. Councilmember Amir Farokhi announced a number of small reforms and changes to the funding package that no one had asked for. The council approved a motion to appoint two City Councilmembers to the Board of Trustees of the APF, ostensibly to create more transparency within that entity, as if City Council were a transparent or trustworthy source of information. If anything, the further entanglement of City Council with the APF can only be a bad thing.

As the final agenda item approached—the vote on funding Cop City—police entered the chambers in large numbers, taking up positions by all of the doors and behind the City Council.

The vote took place at 5:30 am. Eleven Councilmembers voted to pass the funding, with four opposed. The four opposed—Liliana Bakhtiari, Jason

admitted that there was no specific limit for how many people were allowed on the second story; her boss was making it up on the spot. In the meantime, some people gave speeches to those waiting in line, while others shared their thoughts with those beside them. The energy outside was more charged.

Around 1 pm, the 200 people outside began chanting “*if you build it, we will burn it.*” It is possible that a sort of unintentional selection bias caused the unrulier participants to accumulate outside of the building, and the more organized activists inside it. In any case, those outside stood behind a banner reading “Cop City Will Never Be Built” and began pounding on the glass doors. Occasionally, they managed to push the doors open, only to have them slammed shut again by officers inside. After several minutes of this, some people inside realized what was happening, and entered the small security vestibule inside the entrance, chanting “let them in, let them in.”

The situation was becoming unpredictable, with fewer than a dozen officers left alone to control the two crowds on either side of them. More police came down to the atrium from upstairs. If those outside had managed to push through the front doors, the situation could have exploded—perhaps similar to the 2010 mass occupation of the Wisconsin state house in Madison, where tens of thousands of people camped out to prevent the passage of anti-union legislation. At the least, this would have made it difficult to hold the vote that day.

At the last minute, an activist from inside the building came out and explained the fire marshals’ rule to some of the people outside, asking them to be patient. Once the crowd outside was quelled, the inside group was quickly calmed via the same method. Having avoided a stand-off, the police inside returned to their positions on the second and third floors. Protesters resumed their seats in the atrium or their places in the line. Around this time, the sign-up process was closed. 367 people had signed up to speak, roughly one third of the number of people who had come.

Upon the closure of the sign-up process, screams and boos of protesters filled City Hall. Hoping to appease those assembled in order to maintain peace for the Council, Councilmembers introduced and passed a number of motions to allow more people to sign up to speak after this initial list was concluded—roughly 13 hours later. This maneuver allowed the City Council to silence more than 500 people. If people had been able to sign up immediately, they could have left to work or rest and then returned before their time came. The politicians knew that few people were likely to stay and wait inside, especially given that the building locked its doors around midnight.

For over thirteen hours, one speaker after another denounced Cop City. Each was limited to two minutes, though speakers were permitted to yield

assisting those arrested, several hundred people began making their way to their cars, most in a mild panic. A few minutes later, after three or four hundred people had already decided to leave, someone else got on the microphone and stated “Hey guys, don’t leave. We aren’t doing anything wrong. We are sticking together; we are here to listen to music. Come back to the stage. We will be safest if we all stick together to protect one another.” About a hundred and fifty or two hundred people returned to the stage, where musicians continued to perform, despite the panic elsewhere in the forest.

In the weeks following the raid, the most common story in sympathetic news media and within the movement implied that police randomly attacked helpless music festival attendees on the evening of March 5, an hour after the raid on the construction site. This narrative, which is more or less accurate, has garnered the arrestees many people’s sympathy, rendering it more difficult to demonize the movement.

Yet in the context of this narrative, some journalists and politicians have implied that the repression of the music festival was the responsibility of the masked activists who attacked the construction site, implying that they were cynically exploiting the festival. This spin enables the government to shift responsibility for its own tyrannical overreach back onto the victims.

In their own statement on March 5, the police alleged that “a group of violent agitators used the cover of a peaceful protest of the proposed Atlanta Public Safety Training Center [sic] to conduct a coordinated attack.” Ironically, this phrasing implicates the police in attacking festival-goers that they themselves considered to be “peaceful.” But it also shows that the police, too, wish to draw a rhetorical distinction between the music festival attendees and the people who destroyed the construction site, even though they chose not to make any distinction between them on March 5th.

Counter-insurgency strategies dictate that the repressive force must identify a target that can be isolated from the rest of the population. The police have not succeeded in doing this—they have pressed the same “domestic terrorism” charges against virtually all the people they have arrested in relation to the movement, however randomly—but they still wish for the public to imagine that there is a distinction between “peaceful protesters” and “violent agitators.”

In fact, the story of what happened at the music festival after the march is more interesting than any of these constructed narratives.

THE DEFENSE OF THE MUSIC FESTIVAL

After the first few arrests in the RC field, people confronted the police in the parking lot of Weelaunee People's Park. Using stones, shields, and fireworks, scarcely two dozen festival defenders drove the officers out of the parking lot. A few minutes later, officers drove police vehicles into the lot and jumped out, hoping to secure the zone in order to continue their attacks on the festival. People with shields and masks confronted the officers again, this time on the section of bicycle path where Ryan Millsap had torn up the pavement, and just outside of the RC field on a dirt path leading to the Living Room. These people prevented the officers from moving freely into the area.

At the same time, hundreds of people were escaping in every direction, including down the bicycle path behind the lines of rock-throwers. It is likely that at least dozens more people could have been detained or arrested if not for the actions of those who confronted the police around the parking lot. Some of those defenders may have been among the hundreds who had raided the construction site an hour earlier, while others were probably just courageous people willing to act boldly to defend each other from police violence. If another group had confronted the police who were approaching through the other parking lot area closer to Constitution Road, preventing them from accessing the area, the entire police operation might have ended differently.

On their third attempt to enter the forest *en masse*, the police brought an armored Bearcat into the parking lot and fired tear gas. This time, they managed to push the festival defenders back onto the still-paved section of path near the Living Room. Some people were still throwing stones and shooting fireworks at officers in the area. Random officers, still without a plan, pointed guns randomly at park-goers and campers, screaming "Get on the ground!" and yelling "Stop or I'll shoot!" Video footage shows an Atlanta police officer yelling "Come forward with your hands up or you are going to get shot. I don't know how else to put it, you're going to get hit with a bullet." This sort of behavior was not limited to any particular one of the agencies involved.

Following their limited success in the wooded area and parking lot off West Park Place, the police who had attempted to approach through the Living Room repositioned themselves closer to the RC field, where they had a better line of sight. In the process, the Bearcat temporarily got stuck. Having experienced considerable pushback in response to their initial attempts, they were no longer trying to charge in arresting everyone in sight. They focused on isolated individuals, including people attempting to leave the music festival alone.

voters in his country; he has hardly even sought it. Taking advantage of the well-founded fear of Marine Le Pen and the far right, he can keep his enemies even weaker than himself. In this context, he has his hands free to use more and more violence to force through his policies, however unpopular they may be. The draconian state of emergency constructed by Salvadorian president Nayib Bukele epitomizes this strategy in an even bloodier context.

These reference points will help us to understand the unity between Kemp and Dickens in favor of Cop City. This is why they have not hesitated to force through a project that is so unpopular. It remains an open question how the movement against Cop City could create or exploit fault lines in the halls of power. This is important context if the movement is to continue shifting focus to those in elected positions.

HOWEVER THEY VOTE, WE MUST BE UNGOVERNABLE

Atlanta City Council was slated to vote on June 5 on whether to channel \$67 million to the Atlanta Police Foundation. Some people correctly anticipated that the protest could draw twice as many participants as had showed up on May 15.

On June 4, the city government announced that City Hall would close all functions the following day. To spread confusion, they worked with local media to suggest that the City Council meeting was moving online alongside other City Hall functions, with the implication that public comment would not be open. On the morning of June 5, the Mayor's office apparently smuggled a small number of Cop City supporters into the building early and signed them up on a secret list to speak first. Throughout the day, City Hall, the Atlanta Police, the fire marshal, building security, and clerical staff maintained the maximum of confusion within the building in order to limit participation in public comment and to minimize the possibility that opponents of Cop City could shut down the proceedings.

Protesters began arriving around 9 am. By midday, at which point 615 people had entered City Hall, the fire marshal blocked further access. Several hundred more stood outside, where some erected gazebos and folding tables laden with food and water. The atrium inside was packed, with protesters waiting in a gigantic line winding around the building for the chance to sign up to speak. Another fire marshal sought to limit access to the second story, where the sign-up sheet was kept just outside of the Chambers. When confronted, the agent



to drive wedges between them. The unity of Georgia's Democratic mayor and Republican governor in favor of Cop City represents an obstacle to the movement.

If the fight against Cop City had occurred under Donald Trump's presidency, it is likely that it would have drawn more participation and support from the left and liberals. Georgia Governor Brian Kemp derives considerable advantage from positioning himself as a Republican outside the orbit of Donald Trump, because this gives Georgia Democrats political cover to collaborate with him. Together, Kemp, Dickens, and their cronies represent a centrist political project that can use the threat represented by Trump to legitimize their own less overtly authoritarian activities.

In the 21st century, political centrism no longer represents a compromise between two extremes the way that it did for much of the previous century. The rule of bureaucrats struggling to maintain social peace and class reconciliation is more or less behind us. In the 21st century, centrists represent a political pole unto themselves. Rather than "reaching across the aisle" to split the difference between right and left, they have adopted a partisan position in favor of their own technocratic rule, using the threat represented by the far right to terrorize everyone else into submission.

Pretenses to majoritarianism are out the window. For example, French president Emmanuel Macron does not have the support of the majority of

The sun had begun to set. At this point, perhaps 80% of the festival-goers had safely vacated the forest. Officers walked up to the bounce house in the middle of the RC field and pointed rifles inside of it, seeking to terrorize children or their caretakers. A helicopter hovered overhead; drones whirred above the tree line.

It is likely that anyone who stayed in the RC field near the stage or who left the field via Constitution Road did not know about the clashes in the parking lot or in the forest itself, on account of the volume of the music and the division of the terrain effected by the tree line. While a few acts had to cancel due to the police blocking road access to the park, several performers finished their sets while continuing to lead chanting with the crowd. This detail appeared later in courtroom proceedings, cited by assistant prosecutor Lance Cross to argue that everyone assembled there was complicit in the crimes of the movement.

Eventually, many officers approached the stage, some wearing riot gear; they were accompanied by an armored vehicle. The remaining festival attendees, some of whom also may or may not have been among the hundreds who raided the construction site almost two hours earlier, remained united. When the officers came close, everyone present linked arms and sat down on the ground. They began chanting "We have children!" and "Let us leave."

A commanding officer took to a megaphone, asking the crowd to select five representatives to negotiate. Law enforcement also selected five representatives. In a cinematic display of mutually recognized force, the two groups of representatives slowly approached each other. Both the group representing the festival and the group representing the police moved with their hands above their heads, in a sign of non-aggression. In a short conversation, the negotiators agreed that those remaining would not be split into groups, they would not be detained or have their IDs checked, and they would not be arrested. Anyone who needed to retrieve necessary supplies from their tents (such as insulin) would have five minutes to do so. Those responsible for sound equipment or instruments would also be allowed time to break down gear and pack it into their cars. In the end, the solidarity of the musicians and the crowd represented the safest strategy.

By the end of the police operation, police had detained 34 people. Of the detainees, 11 with local addresses were permitted to go free. The police approached repression chiefly as a means to craft a press release—a cynical attempt to legitimize the discourse about "outside agitators" perpetuated by local authorities and their corporate media mouthpieces. This left just 23 under arrest, 21 of whom were in possession of out-of-state IDs.

To date, no one has been charged with crimes specifically related to the physical defense of the music festival.

A PYRRHIC VICTORY?

“If we are victorious in one more battle with the Romans, we will be utterly ruined.”

—Pyrrhus of Epirus

The march on the construction site was the most audacious action against Cop City in two years. As such, it has been among the most polarizing events and has produced some of the most confused analyses. Nonetheless, large swaths of the movement have endorsed the action as legitimate, even if they have reservations about the details. No one can deny the courage that attacking the construction site must have demanded.

It is worth engaging with some of the most commonly expressed reservations about the events, in order to discuss challenges that future movements may also face.

Jumping to Conclusions

Some analyses of the events of March 5 are built on a logical fallacy: mistaking consequences for causes. This error plagues human beings across all disciplines. In politics, it often leads people to reject entire strategies on account of the outcome of a single event. To put it simply, it is a mistake to assume that police repression is the direct and proportional consequence of the actions that immediately preceded it. The timing and form of repression are determined by many factors, including the means at the disposal of the authorities and the pressures bearing on them from a variety of directions. Likewise, repression does not always achieve its objective.

In the aftermath of March 5, some dedicated and thoughtful people drew hasty conclusions, such as “Because of the repression, the time for direct action has passed” and “It is not possible to directly attack the police.” These conclusions are like the reports of a meteorologist attempting to extrapolate the entire climate of Earth from a single day’s weather.

Those who accept this line of argument could arrive at a similar fallacy: *If activists refrain from further acts of sabotage, they will escape further acts of repression. If they are peaceful, they will be safe.* Again, this seems intuitive, but it does not conform to the historical record.

THE ATTACK ON THE SOLIDARITY FUND

Just when it seemed the situation could not become tenser, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp ordered the Georgia Bureau of Investigations, in conjunction with the Atlanta Police, to arrest three activists associated with the Atlanta Solidarity Fund. On May 31, dozens of agents and officers clad in military equipment and carrying rifles broke in a door on Mayson Avenue in Edgewood. The three activists within were longtime activists associated with a variety of mutual aid projects. One of those projects, the Solidarity Fund, was founded in 2016 ahead of a protest against a Ku Klux Klan rally on Stone Mountain.

The Atlanta Solidarity Fund is among the most popular grassroots organizations in Georgia. This organization supports protest movements by helping to pay the bond, legal fees, lawyer fees, and sometimes the commissary of people who experience repression as a consequence of political activity. The members of this group are not participants in the movement to defend Weelaunee Forest, per se. Rather, they maintain an infrastructure that serves a wide range of movements. Fundamentally, they defend free speech and the right to protest. Nothing about their activity is illegal or especially controversial.

Why did Governor Kemp step into this situation? Were the assurances that the Mayor offered to the Police Foundation not good enough? Two days before the raid, the Press Collective announced that taxpayer liability for Cop City was actually double the stated amount. Autonomous organizers in Atlanta announced another Week of Action. People across many tendencies began promoting the June 5 City Council meeting as a day of action.

Whatever the reasoning behind the raid, the ham-fisted action of the Governor created political cover for the Georgia Democratic Senators Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff to denounce the repression of the Solidarity Fund. They had said nothing up to this point. Some state representatives denounced Cop City outright. Multiple members of the City’s new convoluted Task Force called for the project to be canceled. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People demanded not only the cancellation of Cop City, but a US Department of Justice investigation.

THE CENTRISTS VERSUS EVERYONE

We should not mistake the maneuvers of political opportunists for something more than they are. But it is worthwhile to identify which forces are positioning themselves to attack our movements and look for opportunities

On May 15, catalyzed in part by mass outrage to the May 2 arrests, some 500 people flooded the Atlanta City Hall.

The mobilization of May 15 was the largest protest of local residents to date. Exactly five months earlier, a crowd of 250 people had marched in East Atlanta to denounce the “Domestic Terrorism” charges levied against six people. From December to May, repression did not discourage participation in the movement—it doubled it.

Inside the atrium of the City Hall, hundreds of people chanted “Cop City will never be built!” and “Stop Cop City!” When police approached protesters or barked orders at them, the protesters chanted “Viva, viva Tortuguita!” This last chant conveyed defiance: *“You murderers have no right to tell us what to do.”*

The City Council public comment section began at 1 pm. By that time, 288 people had signed up to speak. Over 100 people who were still in line to sign up were rejected. The crowd surged forward, pounding the doors and walls. Police confronted protesters, threatening to call the fire marshal to clear out the building. A number of people who were in the City Hall chambers to speak came out and asked the remaining people to be quiet so that they could speak. The crowd tentatively agreed to this.

Inside the chambers, the comments were fierce. For eight hours, residents from all walks of life chastised the Councilmembers, with some residents even going so far as to repeat one of the slogans of the movement: *“If you build it, we will burn it.”* Someone else told the Councilmembers, to much applause, *“Some of us may go to jail for this, but some of y’all are going to hell for this.”*

Nonetheless, the politicians passed the motion and sent it on to the finance subcommittee. At the meeting of the finance subcommittee a week later, several dozen police officers staged a counter-protest in the City Hall atrium, intimidating the few dozen residents who came to observe.

The public comment section of these meetings is designed to facilitate this kind of contention: to channel the wild resistance and contagious self-activity of the public into official politics so that the activity of all those who are affected by the decision can be replaced by the cowardly and opportunistic decisions of fifteen elected officials. If the movement can send the government into a downward spiral, that may vindicate the decision to engage on the terrain of local politics. If ordinary people end up subordinating their own free initiative to the will of politicians, however, the movement is bound to be defeated.



When Ryan Millsap showed up at the end of July 2022 aiming to destroy Weelaunee People’s Park, then fled after his truck was burned this did not result in a police raid or charges (though if it had, some people would surely have described that as “inevitable”). When police raided the forest in December 2022, they arrested people on domestic terrorism charges simply for camping in the woods. Practically all effective resistance, regardless of the particular tactics involved, eventually draws repression from the state and its proxies; but that repression is rarely systematic or rational.

In this particular case, the state is seeking to build a facility to militarize

police and train them to suppress social movements. If this occurs, social movements of all kinds will face more dangerous repression in the future, and even those who do not participate in such movements will be at greater risk from ordinary police violence. In the long run, preventing the authorities from building Cop City will be safer than withdrawing from the fight.

Likewise, in a thriving movement, it is possible to maintain the kind of solidarity and organizing necessary to support those facing the courts and prison system. The most dangerous thing that participants in this movement could do would be to stop organizing now, giving the authorities a free hand to carry out retaliatory attacks against isolated targets.

Defense

As a tactical or strategic framework, *defense* alone is rarely sufficient to succeed on its own terms. This is important when we consider whether the events of March 5 somehow undermined the possibility of maintaining an encampment in Weelaunee Forest.

Long before March 2023, the administration of mayor Andre Dickens, the Atlanta Police Foundation, and the corporate interests steering the Cop City project had escalated to scorched earth tactics, abandoning any pretense of restraint. Their desperate violence is the consequence of two factors: first, the fact that channeling resources towards the police is a fundamental rather than incidental goal for them, and second, the fact that the movement has been so *effective* up to this point, largely as a result of strategies that made space for offensive actions.

It is a mistake to imagine that the administration would have indefinitely tolerated an occupied autonomous zone within the territory of metro Atlanta. This should have been foreseen in May 2022, when the first serious raid on the forest occurred; it became crystal clear in December 2022, when the police carried out a more intensive raid and prosecutors introduced the first domestic terrorism charges.

The reason that it took several months for the authorities to mount the raid of December 2022 was not that the movement was avoiding confrontation during that time, but rather because the movement had demonstrated so much strength in both defense and offense. The only way to prevent that raid from occurring would have been to defeat the effort to build Cop City before December—which would have demanded considerably *more* offensive effort. Even if the movement had triumphed, the police would probably still have

insurer of the Atlanta Police Foundation, without whom they could not hold contracts for work. The confrontations between forest dwellers, tree sitters, and police have also ended, because it became impossible to hold terrain for long periods following the killing of Tortuguita, leading to the deforestation of half of the Prison Farm.

At the same time, the figure of the forest defender has been pushed outward into society at large, with reciprocal effects. Just as the movement has influenced the politics of tens of thousands of people, the subject of the movement has also transformed, the way light bends and fragments through the lens of a kaleidoscope.

Over the last two years, the movement has managed to build a strong base. A part of that process has involved making a virtue of necessity by taking advantage of repression to mobilize more people against Cop City. Up to today, police have landed scarcely a single clean blow against the movement. Over and over, they have discredited themselves—attacking pedestrians in Little 5 Points, shooting pepper balls at tree sitters, arresting park goers, raiding a music festival. All of these attacks have undermined the narrative that the authorities seek to spread while drawing more people into the movement.

In May 2023, the authorities made a few more serious mistakes. Those mistakes have polarized millions of people against Cop City, bringing more of them closer, step by step, to direct confrontation with the project.

On May 2, three individuals were arrested in Bartow County, Georgia. Their alleged crime? Posting fliers. The three people were booked for felony “Intimidation of a Law Enforcement Officer” and misdemeanor “Stalking” for posting fliers including the names of six Georgia State Patrolmen cited in an internal memo between police departments. These Patrolmen constituted the firing squad that assassinated Tortuguita. As a result of these arrests, many people came to understand that the administration is embracing openly authoritarian tactics against the movement.

Anyone who has lived in the forest, engaged in direct action, or stood at the front lines of the clashes with police over the previous two years already knew that. But now everyone is beginning to see it.

In April, independent researchers with the Atlanta Community Press Collective had showed that, despite their claims to the contrary, the City Council had the power to determine the fate of Cop City. For the Police Foundation to secure New Market Tax Credits and a loan from Cadence Bank, the city government would have to allocate \$16.2 million by June 30, 2023, and an additional \$17.3 million the following year. Atlanta City Council would have to approve this allocation, which was to be introduced on May 15 with the final vote taking place on June 5.

CAMPUS ACTIONS

After Earth Day, coordinated actions broke out on campuses across Atlanta. Students rallied and protested against Cop City at Agnes Scott College, Georgia State University, Emory University, Georgia Tech, Morehouse, Spelman, and Clark Atlanta University. At Georgia Tech and Emory, students initiated encampments.

This represented an escalation for students, many of whom had struggled to establish a basis for collective resistance on campus over the preceding two years. Many students had doubtless participated in the movement, but campus-based actions had been scarce. Decades of budget cuts and austerity had contributed to passivity and hesitation.

Hundreds gathered on the Quad at Emory, building an encampment including tents and chairs with folding tables for amenities. This was the same location at which students organizing to support Sodexo workers fighting for a living wage had established an encampment in 2011. Then, and once again this April, the administration deployed a large cordon of police in the middle of the night to clear the encampment.

The crowd that assembled at Georgia Tech was significantly smaller, where protesters numbered only a couple dozen. Nonetheless, they built a small encampment on the Tech Green. Throughout the night of April 24 into the early morning of the 25th, Georgia Tech police drove their vehicles near the encampment and heckled those assembled. The encampment lasted through the night, but was dispersed the following day.

These efforts illustrated the ways that encampments and crowds in open fields are vulnerable to police aggression. To be effective, student protesters will likely have to experiment with mobile demonstrations, strikes, walkouts, occupations of classrooms or administration buildings, or other forms of disruption.

WAR BY OTHER MEANS

With repression reaching a fever pitch, the dynamics of the struggle have begun shifting once again. The emerging phase seems to pit larger swaths of society against the City government, the Atlanta mayor, and the Atlanta Police Foundation. The confrontation between contractors, funders, and the movement is on the back burner for the time being—though this could change at any point, as Nationwide Insurance has come into focus as the most significant

targeted the occupation of Weelaunee Forest, as occurred in France after the defeat of the airport planned for Notre-Dame-des-Landes.

On January 18, the day the police murdered Tortuguita, it became inescapably evident that the movement could no longer defend territory in the forest, at least not by means of its existing tactical repertoire. But there is more to say about the problem of defense.



Urban Encampments

The encampments established in Spain and Greece in 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and the self-described “autonomous zones” established in several cities at the tail end of the 2020 George Floyd rebellion all showed the benefits of creating a space of encounter where people can gather. At the same time, all of them demonstrated how difficult it is to continuously defend an urban encampment. These examples are pertinent to the movement to stop Cop City, because Weelaunee Forest is located inside the perimeter highway of a major metropolitan area.

Most of the mass urban encampment experiences of the past decade and a half—regardless of their size or popularity—conform to the same pattern: *sudden growth, police encirclement, slow attrition, internal decay, eventual defeat*. The ones

that do not conform to that pattern—the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt in 2011, the Maidan uprising in Ukraine in 2014—ended in revolutions that toppled the governments. In other words, urban encampments can serve to bring people together and create vibrant connections; under the right circumstances, they may even help to catalyze sudden social change on a massive scale; but they cannot hold out indefinitely against better-equipped adversaries. Every day that passes without securing victory is a day closer to the eviction of the camp.

Perhaps the most promising recent example of a movement occupying urban public space took place in Portland, Oregon in summer 2020, when protesters faced down Donald Trump’s effort to show that he could suppress urban unrest by sending in federal agents. Crucially, however, the movement in Portland was not trying to hold specific space continuously, but rather contesting it on a nightly basis.

There is an older historical model for defending autonomous urban space: the squatting movement that established social centers like Ungdomshuset and Rigaer 94 across Europe. Setting aside the fact that these movements had their origins during an era of relative social peace—and in a completely different real estate market, in which the property in question was much less essential to the functioning of capitalism than Atlanta politicians consider Cop City to be—the important thing to understand about the historic squatting movement is that it was a side effect of much larger struggles. It was only by keeping the authorities tied up in battles far from their homes that the squatters were able to retain their autonomy.

In the case of Ungdomshuset, for example, squatters carried out a series of offensive occupations for a year, experiencing one defeat after another, before the city government permitted them to take over the initial location of Ungdomshuset as a compromise intended to broker social peace. Seventeen years later, hoping that the squatting movement had lost steam, the city government set out to evict the building—and eventually succeeded, only to be forced to relinquish another building to the squatters after a full year of riots and other protests.

In other words, as participants in the George Floyd Rebellion argued in regards to “cop-free zones,”

Even if our goal is simply to hold a particular physical space, we have to prioritize carrying out offensive activities throughout society at large that can keep our adversaries on the defensive, while investing energy in the activities that nourish movements and spaces rather than focusing on defending particular boundaries. We should understand occupied spaces as an effect of our efforts, rather than as the central cause we rally around.

DEFORESTATION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Throughout the month of April, the clear-cutting proceeded unchecked. Surprisingly, no serious effort materialized to defend the forest. One group reportedly burned three machines belonging to Brent Scarborough Company, the tree fellers, at a different location. Activists were licking their wounds and reorganizing for the next phase of resistance. Repression was beginning to have an impact on the imaginations and nervous systems of those who had contributed to the encampments and to on- and off-site direct action since 2021. Inability to directly stop the destruction of the forest any longer represented a serious limit in the movement.

Brent Scarborough Company cut down 85 acres of the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. All of the woods near the North Gate, all of the forest near Fairie Top, Vengeance Village, and other named sites—from Constitution to Key, nearly everything west of the powerline cut was destroyed.

Some fell into despair. Others sought to develop new strategies. Many didn’t know what to do. Others, whose participation in the movement has not revolved around the forest, continued forward more or less unimpeded by the felling of the trees. The fact that their strategies had never been centered in the physical defense of territory had made some forms of activity impossible for them, but this made other things possible—as was about to become clear. A weekend of solidarity events and actions was announced to coincide with Earth Day and Tortuguita’s birthday.

EARTH DAY WEEKEND OF RESILIENCE

In honor of Earth Day, April 22, and Tortuguita’s birthday, April 23, people organized dozens of events, including fundraisers, presentations, performances, and protests. In some cities, events occurred every day of the week. Thanks to persistent nationwide efforts, the movement was solidifying a foothold in the imaginations of millions across the country. Organizers no longer had to request time on microphones or stages to say a few words about Cop City or the defense of the forest. Performers, bands, presenters, academics, and public figures across the country were speaking about the movement, declaring their support for it, sharing updates about it with their respective audiences.

destruction of the Cop City construction because they chanted “stop Cop City” between songs. At the same time, activists labored to support the accused and those still in jail. Across the country, people organized support committees and began releasing statements to local press about out-of-state arrests. They also got to work spearheading fundraisers, conducting outreach, and organizing local solidarity actions. For all of March and most of April, the movement appeared in national and local news every single day. The coverage skewed positive, thanks in part to the tireless efforts of activists who continued to work with journalists and editors to clarify facts and provide quotes.

On March 24, DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond held a press conference. He announced his plans to close down Intrenchment Creek Park (i.e., Weelaunee People’s Park) in order to address “safety concerns.” He claimed that his employees had discovered “boards of nails” and other unsafe debris in the forest and that he had to close the park for the safety of the residents of southwest DeKalb County. This is straight out of the playbook of Kasim Reed, the former mayor of Atlanta, who ordered police to erect 10-foot-tall fences around Woodruff Park in order to crush the Occupy Atlanta movement on “public health and safety” grounds. The images that Michael Thurmond showed to television viewers featured random pieces of trash and planks of wood that had previously been part of the treehouses that DeKalb police had helped to destroy. As of mid-June, the park remains closed.

Closing the park enabled the Atlanta Police Foundation to begin clear-cutting the Prison Farm without fearing that protesters or media would mobilize across the creek.

With no on-the-ground encampment and an apparent downswing of nocturnal sabotage, the clear-cutting of Weelaunee began on March 31. Brasfield & Gorrie contracted Brent Scarborough Company, a co-operative enterprise that donates to Governor Kemp and the Police Foundation, to destroy the trees. It remains unclear what happened to Atlas Technical Consultants, a firm that typically does clearing and grading but which had faced dozens of actions across the country.

For a week, felling of trees continued around the clock at the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. Police were deployed throughout the area on a massive scale, with multiple police vehicles parked at every intersection of Key Road and Fayetteville Road. Police routinely established checkpoints on Constitution Road. Around the forest on all sides, suited men inside unmarked vehicles pointed cameras at every vehicle driving by. Drones hovered above the zone by night. The costs of this security are not yet known, but they are likely in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Victory, and thus real safety, does not come from establishing impregnable defensive positions or security plans. It does not *only* depend on keeping open supply lines, garnering public sympathy, and drawing massive and diverse participation. It *also* depends on overextending the adversary, outmaneuvering their logistics, overwhelming their personnel, outpacing their communications.

Likewise, if a movement aims to maintain territory somewhere, it must make sure the battle lines are elsewhere. Even if the goal is simply to broker a peace treaty with the authorities—an optimistic venture in a time when it hardly appears that anyone is in a position to compromise—it will only be possible to do this if the movement can wield leverage offensively. Safety derives from agility, not brute strength. It is determined by what happens on the front lines, not inside the castle.

The Limits of Deterrence

Like many movements before it, the movement to defend Weelaunee Forest initially relied on a strategy of deterrence. In the warmer months, the forest encampments benefited from dense canopy cover, which created an unpredictable terrain for police incursions. Indeed, until March 5, 2023, police had practically never ventured into the forest at night. This is why the forest occupations lasted for over a year, considerably longer than any of the aforementioned urban encampments.

At the same time, for the first year and a half, participants in the movement assumed that there would be limits to the violence that police used against them. The murder of Tortuguita changed this.

If the police do not depend on popular support, if the city government can take popular support for granted because their far-right Republican competition is even less popular than they are, then it is a mistake to rely on public outrage to discourage police violence. As the film industry and electric car manufacturing relocate to Georgia, many urban areas and suburbs are filling up with wealthy liberal transplants from the Northeast and West Coast, pushing poor people out into the Atlanta exurbs and changing the electoral leanings of those municipalities. Consequently, Georgia is on the brink of becoming a “swing state” in federal elections. This gives local politicians considerable leverage, which they will likely use to pressure their colleagues both locally and nationally into supporting them no matter what they do.

Even if it is possible for the movement to counter this by exerting leverage of its own, this will only come about as a consequence of establishing

deterrence on a new footing after the murder of Tortuguita—for example, by inflicting significant material consequences for it, or by making the entire Cop City project too expensive to be worthwhile even to its foremost advocates.

Seen through this lens, the shortcomings of the March 5 action did not result from it being gratuitously offensive, nor simply from poor timing or inadequate defense alone, but rather from *inadequate offense*.

Time and Space

Some people have stated that they do not object to the march on the construction site, only to the timing. The strongest version of this argument suggests that the march could have happened at the end of the week or after the music festival. If the march had taken place at a different time, the argument goes, it might have had less of a negative impact on other tactics, activities, or groups.

The Week of Action, as an organizing tool, allows for large numbers of people to converge in specific places during a specific period of time. This density of participation makes certain actions possible that would otherwise be impossible. For instance, the re-taking of Weelaunee People's Park on March 4 was facilitated in part by the hundreds of people in the front of the crowd with shields, banners, and masks. The arrival of hundreds of participants from outside of Atlanta was crucial to enabling a few hundred locals to camp in the forest—something few were prepared to do otherwise after the killing of Tortuguita.

Although there is no way to know, it is conceivable that many of the visitors from out of town who arrived for the music festival of March 4 and 5 already planned to leave by Monday. This would have matched the pattern of previous Weeks of Action, during which the crowds during the opening and closing weekends have been much larger than the numbers present mid-week. The final weekend of the March 2023 Week of Action had been organized around a Food Autonomy festival, at which farmers and naturalists were scheduled to discuss their food-related projects from around the country. If anything, that would have been a worse time for a march on the construction site.

If all this is so, then the march on the construction site might not have been possible at any time other than March 4 or 5. In that case, it is not a question of *when* it should have happened, but of *whether* it should have happened at all.

This does not negate the criticism that the action occurred at a bad time. In some ways, there is no good time to carry out an offensive action that pushes a movement to its limits.

CLEARING OUT

On March 13, the first day after the fifth Week of Action, Tortuguita's family and their lawyer released the horrific results of an independent autopsy report. The report indicated what many had already suspected: Tortuguita had not fired at police. They had not "ambushed" officers, as the Georgia Bureau of Investigation claimed, nor "engaged in a firefight," as the *New York Times* alleged. Despite the rhetoric of a few militants, they had not carried out an armed attack on the state, even though such an action could be understandable in the current climate. Instead, the autopsy suggested, they had been murdered while sitting on the ground.

The report states they were likely seated with their legs crossed. They had both of their hands in the air with their palms facing them. Tortuguita's mother Belkis claimed that this is the position their community uses for meditation. They had succumbed to 57 entry wounds, including some at close range from multiple angles. In short, they had faced a firing squad.

Most damning of all, this autopsy found that there was no trace of "gunshot residue" on their hands. Any residue on their hands could easily be attributed to the close-range shots aimed directly at them, including into both of their palms, like stigmata. Aside from local outlets, most of which are owned by Cop City backers, national coverage of the January 18 killing no longer includes the claim that Tortuguita fired upon patrolmen, which officials have still offered no evidence for fully five months later.

For many, this report was vindicating. For others, it was shocking proof of brutality. Others still did not believe what they heard, crediting neither the analysis of the movement nor the reports of the authorities. The results of the independent autopsy were reinforced by the findings of the official Dekalb County autopsy report, which was not released until April 21.

The rest of March was challenging for local authorities and activists alike. Mayor Andre Dickens faced pressure from the movement, but also from powerful forces in the state government and Police Foundation. In the final weeks of March, local news outlets repeatedly depicted Dickens at civic events, shaking hands with volunteers, attending ribbon-cutting ceremonies, and playing with small children. They sought to manage Dickens' public image in order to distract attention from his clampdown on popular protests—especially after the March 13 autopsy report.

In court appearances, prosecutor John Fowler painted a picture of a vast conspiratorial network coordinated by a well-funded leadership. Prosecutor Lance Cross argued that the attendees of the music festival were party to the



Controlling Risk

“Separation of time and space” and diversity of tactics have been guiding principles for this movement. The general idea is that events inviting different degrees of risk should take place in different locations or at different times, in order that participants in the movement can be aware of the kinds of actions they are taking part in. Ideally, this framework should enable more risk-tolerant groups to use their preferred tactics without fear that others will bear the consequences.

At the same time, the movement to defend Weelaunee Forest has always benefitted from the weaving of different tactics and strategies into a symbiotic whole. The music and chanting on the final night of the fourth Week of Action were more meaningful in the context of the burnt-out wreckage of Ryan Millsap’s truck; the support of various music scenes has bolstered the numbers of people prepared to fight against Cop City. By making it impossible for the police to distinguish between “peaceful protesters” and “violent agitators,” this approach enabled the movement to hold off the construction process for almost a year.

As long as there was a balance of force between the movement and the police, the risk tolerance of some participants in the movement contributed to the safety of all. This only shifted in December, when Atlanta police managed to bring in a wide range of repressive agencies from around Georgia in order to go on the offensive.

As of 2023, the administration and police agencies no longer perceive the movement against Cop City as a protest movement. At least some groups within the government have shifted to treating the situation as a domestic insurgency, bringing military actions and strategies to bear: counterattacks, spoiling attacks aimed at disrupting assembly points and logistics, collective punishment, political prosecution and punitive charging, show trials, lethal force. This makes it difficult to maintain a separation of time and space between different risk levels. Police have begun to respond even to the tamest legal actions as if they are the work of “domestic violent extremists.” When even posting a flier could result in being charged with felony “intimidation” and “stalking,” there is little advantage to opting for tactics that would ordinarily be less risky.

The greatest danger, in this situation, is that continuous escalation will thin the movement out, depriving it of the inclusive character that has been a source of strength. Yet unilateral de-escalation is also impossible, as the police are chiefly responsible for the pattern of intensifying violence and danger—and it

Some prisoners possess printed fragments, paper clippings, scrawled letters, and other archival documents passed down hand-to-hand in the facility from one cell to the next, detailing the history of those events and their meaning.

Over the weekend, as the Week of Action was wrapping up, a few hundred people gathered in the forest—more or less an entirely new cohort. This new group was the Food Autonomy Festival. For the next two days, small growers, urban farmers, naturalists, gardeners, and others from across the country hosted fireside conversations, workshops, walking tours, and shared meals in Weelaunee People’s Park. Despite the helicopters overhead and the occasional attempts by police to intimidate those in attendance, the weekend continued without difficulty. Reportedly, several hundred fruit-bearing plants were transplanted into the forest at various locations. As of early June, nearly 70% of the transplants had survived and were showing signs of growth.

The following week, in mid-March, the city government began imposing gratuitous fines and code violations on the Park Avenue church, which had allowed protesters to use the facility as a rendezvous point in early March. Attendees of at least two separate *do-it-yourself* punk rock shows, one at a local community arts space and one at a house, were surveilled by police via drone and helicopter. On police scanners, officers referred to the young show-goers as “protesters.” Both of the events were fundraisers for those facing charges from the March 5 arrests.

The coming months were poised to be extremely difficult.

is difficult to speak of de-escalation when a large part of the forest has already been reduced to dunes of exposed clay and dirt, forcing white-tailed deer and other creatures out of their home into the inhospitable subdivisions nearby.

After the events of March 5, the path forward seemed uncertain. If actions are best judged by the horizons of possibility that they create, the march on the construction site did not increase the frequency of subsequent direct action or sabotage, nor inspire a new wave of countrywide solidarity actions. Facing so much repression, it is crucial to innovate new strategies and tactics before the movement is trapped in a blind alley. The best approaches don't just actualize the plans and desires of the participants, they also broaden the imagination of the movement as a whole.

For all of these reasons, the events of March 5 should be considered neither a defeat nor an unqualified success. Rather, the framework of "Pyrrhic victory" probably best describes what occurred. The march on the construction site succeeded in striking another blow against the plan to build Cop City—ratcheting up security costs, honoring Tortuguita's memory, and setting new precedents for resistance—but an attempt to repeat that model any time soon would probably destroy the movement.

THE AFTERMATH

The 23 people arrested during the music festival are all being charged with Domestic Terrorism under Georgia's HB 452. None of them are accused of throwing stones at riot police. None of them are accused of shooting fireworks at armored vehicles. None of them are accused of using Molotov cocktails to protect protesters, nor of setting Earth-destroying equipment on fire. Instead, they are accused of wearing black clothing, of having traces of mud on their shoes, of wearing camouflage, of running from officers, of being out of breath, of having wet clothing, of possessing a mask. The warrants for all 23 are identical, listing the same general actions for all of them, without reference to specific evidence or witnesses.

All of them—both detainees and arrestees—were brought to Gresham Park for questioning by the Georgia and Federal Bureau of Investigations. Among the interrogators was at least one man pretending to work for the District Attorney's office, who misleadingly implied that detainees could trust him. One of the lead interrogators is an agent named Ronald C. Sluss, who afterwards appeared as the sole witness at the magistrate and pre-trial hearings. He and four other undercover agents had also attended the January 21 protest

THE CONCLUSION OF THE FIFTH WEEK OF ACTION

On the morning of March 10, helicopters circled above the Lakewood Environmental Arts Foundation (LEAF). On the ground, dozens of police officers with rifles drawn raided the homestead owned by the non-profit organization. The officers smashed windows, detaining residents and destroying their belongings.

The search warrant—which the police reportedly refused to share during the raid—was signed by a Fulton County Judge. The officers claimed to be seeking materials associated with "Domestic Terrorism," such as "boxes of nails" and "planks of wood." Even with this absurdly broad warrant, no such items were found.

Some had thought of this house as the "safer" location. It was described as a space offering housing during the week of action for people who were especially risk-averse or had needs that other locations could not accommodate. Police arrested one person there for an unrelated parking ticket, an offense that does not lead to arrest in most states but for which Georgia residents are routinely incarcerated. This was a serious escalation, confirming a new strategy: the state had begun aggressively targeting what the authorities perceived to be the support structures of the movement.

On March 10, hours after the raid on LEAF, protesters began assembling in East Atlanta Village at Brownwood Park. This crowd was organized by the coalition of educators, young schoolchildren, and their parents that had repeatedly organized events in the forest as well as protests. Over 100 people attended this event, which drew enthusiastic support from neighbors and motorists.

Later that day, a crowd gathered at the Dekalb County Jail, where arrestees from January and March were still being held. Over 100 people marched along the sidewalk banging pots and pans and chanting slogans expressing solidarity with the captives within. Wishing to contribute to the situation, some prisoners began breaking their windows from inside the jail. This was not the first time that this had occurred at the notorious facility. Once the glass was broken, some began throwing hand-written notes to the crowd on the street below. Others waved shirts and rags to get the attention of the crowd. When police and guards came out onto the sidewalks to look up at the commotion, prisoners inside lit objects on fire and threw them down at the officers, to the merriment of the crowd.

Afterwards, imprisoned forest defenders reported that the legacy of the noise demonstrations outside of this facility over the past ten years is folkloric to some of those inside, who understand them as the initiative of "the anarchists."



weather. After the speeches, organizers announced to the crowd that they were going to get behind some banners, that they were going to stick together, and that they were going to march to the Atlanta Police Foundation headquarters. This was an incredibly bold decision.

As the crowd gathered behind the banners and took the streets, they chanted militant, anti-police slogans. Helicopters circled overhead, and red pickup trucks—likely undercover agents—circled in the vicinity of the demonstration. Remaining in formation, the crowd eventually reached Peachtree Street, arriving at the APF headquarters in the tower at 191 Peachtree Street, which is owned by Banyan Street Capital. The building was totally boarded up, as were some of the adjacent banks that had been vandalized during the demonstration of January 21 in response to the killing of Tortuguita. Riot police lined up in front of the entrance, holding sticks. The crowd faced them. The atmosphere was tense, but the crowd of nearly 600 remained unified, chanting “stop Cop City” in unison as well as the now-popular “Cop City will never be built!”

Following fierce and fiery speeches, the group departed without incident. Sticking together, everyone made it back to the King Center and dispersed, being careful not to allow police to grab anyone on their way home.

This event was subject to a near media blackout. Aside from one article in *The Guardian*, almost no outlets reported on the protest, nor on the massive mobilization of police opposing it.

in plainclothes, and later attended the May 15 City Council mobilization.

Unfortunately, many of those detained and several of those arrested did offer information to law enforcement. The consequences of those conversations are not yet fully known.

Some worried that the consequences of the March 5 raid on the construction site or the subsequent police raid on the music festival would crush the movement. Indeed, the costs of repression were stacking up higher and higher. In addition, many feared that charges based on the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act would be brought against activists, based on information the District Attorney’s office had conveyed through back channels ahead of the Week of Action.

Nonetheless, while the repression of the movement did not end on March 5, the Week of Action did not, either.

THE WEEK OF ACTION CONTINUES

For the next several days, at least 100 people camped in Weelaunee People’s Park. Many of them had stayed there the very night of the raid. Gathering around campfires and stoves, activists continued to discuss movement strategy, to coordinate actions, and to give guided tours and walks. Others hosted spiritual ceremonies and prayers. Police did not enter the encampment again, although they did send drones and helicopters to surveil the scene several times a day. Across the river, the Cop City construction site was a pile of ash. Across the world, radio coverage, news headlines, and memetic video footage reported the attack on the facility. Organizers of the South River Music Festival denounced the repression while refusing to condemn the march on the construction site. At the same time, other actions continued across Atlanta.

For the rest of the week, dozens of people met downtown during the day to plan actions. They marched into the lobbies of Cop City funders, picketed outside office buildings, and distributed fliers to the public. Senior citizens disrupted a Brasfield & Gorrie jobsite, demanding they boycott the APF. Banners decrying Cop City appeared over interstate highways and major thoroughfares throughout the week.

The police remained on edge. When one group of predominantly older activists assembled on Peachtree Street to distribute fliers about Cop City, dozens of police vehicles, including an armored vehicle, mobilized alongside police in riot gear to confront them. Atlanta police chief Derrick Shierbaum

himself commanded them to disperse into smaller groups. This took place in the middle of the afternoon on the busiest street downtown.

WITHOUT A SHADOW OF DOUBT

On Thursday, March 9, several hundred people gathered at the King Center in Old Fourth Ward. At that time, this was the largest protest that had taken place outside of the forest. They assembled at the historic site in the pouring rain. Twice as many people might have come if not for the persistent downpour.

The event was organized by Black organizations in Atlanta committed to stopping Cop City. For weeks prior, the Mayor's office had exerted pressure against their clientele structures in the local left, sending former Democratic Socialists of America member and State Senator Vincent Fort to the meetings of nearly every local Black nonprofit and organizing group. Mayor Andre Dickens sent Fort and others to the Labor Council and to meetings of abolitionist groups, social justice groups, and housing rights organizations. He sought to make the case to all of the entities he works with, awards grants and contracts to, and appoints to positions that they should boycott the Defend the Forest/Stop Cop City movement, and that they should stay away from the protest scheduled for March 9 in particular.



The specter of a large, predominantly Black mobilization loomed large in the Mayor's office. Opponents of the movement in the local government and the police department, as well as neoliberal centrists and the grassroots university-educated far left, all tend to justify their opposition or indifference to the historic movement by alleging that it is composed chiefly of white people from out of town. The mobilization of March 9 could jeopardize that narrative if it foregrounded the participation of Black Atlantans, as the Morehouse action had previously done in January.

Predictably, the final effort of the city government to obstruct this demonstration came in the form of an overwhelming police response. Police in riot gear, in armored vehicles, in helicopters, in cruisers, on bicycles, on foot, and in unmarked cars encircled the demonstration for several blocks in every direction. This mobilization can only be compared to the way police respond to national-scale security events. There were even more officers than typically staged around the CNN Center during the 2020 George Floyd rebellion, perhaps owing to the fact that National Guard were not serving as an auxiliary force to support local police outside the King Center for this protest. The chief intended audience for this police mobilization were the corporate executives and white, wealthy Buckhead secessionists who might have been cowed by the events of March 5.

From a security standpoint, the presence of the police was completely gratuitous, as event organizers had already proclaimed far and wide their intention to hold a non-combative gathering. They had even organized their own security for the event—though regrettably, that security sometimes stood with their backs to the police, facing the crowd rather than protecting them. In any case, the event was fierce, and proved that large numbers of people were still prepared to take the streets.

As the crowd assembled, speakers from organized groups spoke one after another on the urgent need to stop Cop City. They spoke about issues facing Black residents of Atlanta and Black people more broadly. Tortuguita's mother, Belkis Teran, addressed the crowd, encouraging them to do everything they could to protect the forest and stop the project. She told those gathered that the blood of her child now runs in the veins of the movement. A speaker from the Muscogee Creek Helvpe ceremonial grounds in Oklahoma spoke alongside militant abolitionists, Black nationalists, and other Black organizers. One organizer spoke at length about the need to develop infrastructure, skills, and materials to support "our warriors." Judging by the inflection in their voice, the cadence of their delivery, and the timing of the event, they were referring to those who engage in direct action, including the actions of March 5. The crowd was jubilant, despite the